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LONDON FOR GOLDRICH  
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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION ON TRANSFER OF IRAQI AUTHORITY

#### Summary

-- The transfer of authority to the Iraqis is the lead story today, June 29. With the exception of Arabic daily Al-Arab Al-Yawm, all dailies carry front-page coverage of the handing over of authority. All papers feature King Abdullah's congratulatory message to the new Iraqi president. Editorial commentary views the transfer as "a positive step in the right direction" but reflects cautious optimism with regard to the new government's tasks and responsibilities in light of the security situation.

#### Editorial Commentary

-- "A point of transition in Iraq's history"

Center-left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour (06/29) editorializes: "Handing authority over to the Iraqis is a particularly significant event at this stages, because however it is seen or described, it is an event that creates new facts on the grounds.. We could ask a lot of questions about the authorities and capabilities vested in this assumption of control. However, these questions will remain unanswered until the new leaders of Iraq show us their capability to act, to impose sovereignty of law, to manage well Iraqi ministries and institutions, and to ensure the safety and security of the Iraqi people. We are not in the business of placing bets, but rather we are recognizing the difficult and complicated tasks that await this leadership.. Everyone knows that restoring security in Iraq is no longer an Iraq-only issue, as such. Chaos there and the accompanying attacks that target the Iraqi people themselves and try to thwart every step towards achieving a reasonable degree of stability and a better life for Iraqis indicate the presence of an entity in Iraq that is growing as a result of confrontations with foreign troops, but also that has an agenda that goes beyond Iraq. While acknowledging that the transfer of authority to the Iraqis is but a step on the long hard road, it our duty to remind everyone of the importance of supporting the Iraqi leadership at this stage so it might rise up to the tasks at hand."

-- "A step in the right direction"

Daily columnist Urayb Rintawi writes on the op-ed page of center-left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour (06/29): "Despite rumors of the possibility of postponing the transfer of authority to the Iraqis, Bremer and the Iraqi government surprised everyone by pushing this deadline forward. Security considerations may have been responsible somewhat for this decision, but the important thing is that the step was taken and, by all standards, it is a step in the right direction that cannot be belittled by the fact that it takes place while occupation troops are still on the ground.. The hot issue inside and outside Iraq, namely the future of the American occupation, will most likely remain on Iraq's agenda until that time when the occupation's departure is complete. The more the Iraqis move towards restoring security and stability and reestablishing the Iraqi state, the sooner they can call for the end and departure of the occupation."

-- "With and next to a united and sovereign Iraq"

Semi-official, influential Arabic daily Al-Rai (06/29) editorializes: "A strong and united new Iraq must be the outcome of the efforts of its people, far away from sectarianism, tribalism and ethnicity. It is an Iraq that respects the culture and specificity of minorities in a framework of unity. We in Jordan look to the new stage that Iraq just crossed into with faith and optimism. The old and modern history of Iraq confirms that all Iraqis of all background are

capable of building their country in a manner that honors its well-known civilization and accomplishments."

-- "Positive steps in Iraq"

Daily columnist Mohammad Amayreh writes on the op-ed page of semi-official, influential Arabic daily Al-Rai (06/29): "What happened in Iraq yesterday is a positive step.. The important thing, however is the coming steps and procedures that seek to establish a democratic and free regime in Iraq. Many obstacles stand in the way of this enormous task.. The security situation in Iraq makes this hard to achieve, and this is where the new Iraqi leadership noted the role that the Iraqi people can play in carrying these burdens and responsibilities. Bremer's departure from the Iraqi territories indicates the departure of the symbol of the occupation. However, other steps must follow towards ending the Anglo-American occupation.. We hope that the new leadership will be up to the level of expectations and hopes of the Iraqis and those who are concerned for Iraq's people, unity and independence."

GNEHM